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... We Must Modernize Our Own Strategic Forces'

Following are excerpts from President Carter's address yesterday to the American Newspaper Publishers Association:

I want, first of all, to commend and endorse the theme of this convention: the defense of the First Amendment and the freedom of the press.

Liberty of expression is our most important civil right, and the freedom of the press is its most important bulwark. We can never afford to grow complacent about the First Amendment. On the contrary, we must actively protect it always.

The American press has grown enormously since our nation's early days—not only in size and breadth, but in its conception of its own duties and responsibilities. The highest of those duties is to inform the public on the important issues of the day. And no issue is more important than the one I want to discuss with you today—the control of nuclear arms.

Each generation of Americans faces a choice that defines its character—a choice that is also important for what it says about our nation's outlook on the world.

In the coming months, we will almost certainly be faced with such a choice: whether to accept or to reject a new strategic arms limitation treaty [SALT]. The decision we make will profoundly affect our lives—and the lives of people all over the world—for years to come.

We face this choice from a position of strength—as the strongest nation on earth—politically, economically and militarily. We have a capacity for leadership in the world that surpasses that of any other nation.

That leadership imposes many responsibilities upon us, but our noblest duty is to use our strength to serve our highest interest: the building of a secure, stable and peaceful world.

In our relations with the Soviet Union, the possibility of mutual annihilation makes a strategy of peace the only rational choice for both sides.

As the Congress and the American people consider the SALT treaty which is now nearly complete, the debate will center around four basic questions.

First, why do we need a strategic arms limitation treaty?

We need it because it will contribute to a more peaceful world—and to our own national security.

Today, we and the Soviet Union with sharply different world outlooks and interests, both have the ominous destructive power literally to destroy each other as a functioning society, killing tens of millions of people in the process. And common sense tells us—as it tells the Soviet Union—that we must work to make our competition less dangerous, less burdensome, and less likely to bring the ultimate horror of nuclear war.

Indeed, the entire world has a vital interest in controlling the strategic arms race.

We have consulted closely with our allies, who count on us not only to maintain strong military forces to offset Soviet military power, but also to manage successfully a stable East-West relationship. SALT is at the heart of both these crucial efforts. That is why the leaders of France, Great Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany, Canada and other nations have voiced their support for the emerging Treaty.

Some nations which have so far held back from building nuclear weapons will be strongly influenced by whether the two nuclear superpowers will restrain our own weapons. Rejection of the new strategic arms treaty would seriously undermine the effort to control proliferation of these deadly weapons. And nothing would more surely damage our other critical efforts in arms control.

An overwhelming majority of the American people recognize the need for SALT II. Our people want and expect continued, step-by-step progress toward bringing nuclear weapons under control. Americans will support a reasoned increase in our defense effort, but we do not want a wholly unnecessary return to the Cold War and an all-out arms race, with vastly greater risks and costs. Through strength, we want world peace.

Let me turn to the second question—how SALT II is related to our overall defense strategy.

The strategic forces of the United States and the Soviet Union today are essentially equivalent. They have larger and more numerous land-based missiles. We have a larger number of warheads, and significant technological and geographical advantages.

Each side has the will and the means to prevent the other from achieving superiority. Neither side is

in a position to exploit its nuclear weapons for political purposes, nor to use strategic weapons without facing almost certain suicide.

What causes us concern is not the current balance but the momentum of the Soviet strategic buildup. Over the past decade, the Soviets have steadily increased their real defense spending, while ours has had a net decrease. In areas not limited by SALT I, they have launched ambitious programs to strengthen their strategic forces. At some future point, they could achieve a strategic advantage—unless we alter these trends.

That is exactly what I intend to do—with the support of the American people and the bipartisan support of Congress.

We must move on two fronts at the same time:

First, within mutually accepted limits, we must modernize our own strategic forces. Along with the strengthening of NATO, that is a central purpose of the increased defense budget I have submitted to the Congress.

Second, we must place more stringent limits on the arms race than are presently imposed by SALT I. That is the purpose of the SALT II treaty.

The defense budget I have submitted will ensure that our nuclear force continues to be essentially equivalent to that of the Soviet Union.

The SALT II agreement will slow the growth of Soviet arms and limit the strategic competition, and by helping to define future threats we might face, SALT II will make our defense planning more effective.

Under the agreement, the two sides will be limited to equal numbers of strategic launchers for the first time, ending the Soviet numerical advantage permitted in SALT I.

SALT II will also impose the first limited but important restraints on the race to build new systems and improve existing ones—the so-called "qualitative" arms race.

Let me turn now to the third of the four questions. How can we know whether the Soviets are living up to their obligations under this SALT agreement? We are confident that no significant violation of the treaty could take place without the United States detecting it.

Our confidence in the verifiability of the agreement derives from the